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## Stephen Crane: Metropolitan Correspondent

Joseph Katz<sup>1</sup>

According to oral tradition in Port Jervis, New York, Stephen Crane is supposed to have written for the *Daily Union* and the *Evening Gazette*, the two major newspapers in that village during the 1890s. Because no one yet has found anything by Crane in either of those papers, the discovery of three pieces by him—a series called “From the Metropolis” (transcribed below)—in the Port Jervis *Evening Gazette* is important. The series expands a canon that appeared to have been fixed by *The University of Virginia Edition of the Works of Stephen Crane*.<sup>2</sup> That of course raises the possibility of other unrecorded works still to be found. But this series is more important even than that. Because it was published by the *Evening Gazette* on 21 August, 28 August, and 9 September 1896—when *The Red Badge of Courage* was a bestseller and Crane had an international audience—it reveals an aspect of Crane’s life that has been unnoticed by his biographers. He is supposed to have left behind the school of small-time journalism in which he learned his trade, but in fact he was moonlighting as New York correspondent for one of the least significant newspapers in the country. Perhaps most important, these three pieces also shed light on two apparently unrelated mysteries in Crane’s life: why he became involved with a notorious prostitute and why Theodore Roosevelt came to despise him.

Crane had a special relationship with Port Jervis. A wanderer all his life, he had ambivalent feelings about being footloose. He obviously enjoyed the excitement and freedom of movement. Less obviously, the youngest child of an itinerant Methodist minister longed for a hometown, a place to be “from.” Young Stephen had lived in Port Jervis with his mother and father for a couple of years until his father died in 1880. Then, still a child, he returned there with his mother for another couple of years in the early eighties. Throughout all this time some of his brothers were establishing residences in the village. His elder brother, William Howe Crane, rose to prominence there as a lawyer, politician, judge, and speculator. Stephen Crane presumably visited his family as he was



growing up on the move. He liked the area; he made friends in the village. So after his mother died in December 1891, he adopted Port Jervis as his hometown and began nurturing plans to make his eventual home in the area when it came time to settle down.<sup>3</sup>

Crane in turn became special to Port Jervis. He benefitted from the afterglow of his father, who had been so well loved by the villagers that they overflowed Drew Methodist Episcopal Church at his funeral there. He also basked in the luster of his brother, the Judge, who was active in the highest social sphere of Port Jervis and who looked to become very rich because of his investments in local real estate. When Stephen Crane published his first novel *Maggie* in 1893 he developed luminance of his own. The competing *Daily Union* and *Evening Gazette* rivalled each other in praising his work, recording his accomplishments, and noting his comings and goings. The attention pleased him. He stimulated it by dropping into the newspaper offices for occasional chats. It was easy to do. The *Daily Union* was housed on the first floor of the building in which William H. Crane had his law offices; the *Evening Gazette* was a few doors up the street; both were just a few blocks from Will's house on East Main Street, where Stephen lived while he was in Port Jervis. It is not surprising then that while Crane was working in New York City during the summer of 1896, the *Evening Gazette* welcomed his service as their metropolitan correspondent.

It might seem surprising that Crane bothered to do it. After all, this was the time when *The Red Badge of Courage* had made his name saleable in larger markets. But Crane took the job for two reasons. One is financial. Although a small, four-page local newspaper like the *Evening Gazette* would have paid him no more than a few dollars for each column, Crane always needed money. By the fall of 1896, with the mistaken notion that *The Red Badge of Courage* would pour money into his pockets, he had undertaken commitments that required more money than was available. So even small sums from the *Evening Gazette* would have been welcome. And it was easy money. Earning it required only that Crane turn "paragrapher" for a few hours each week. He had to do nothing more than string together offhand paragraphs on any subject that came to mind. He had spent years doing just that while working summers for his brother Townley's press bureau at Asbury Park, New Jersey, and he would do it again a few months later to produce his European letters when he and Cora Crane needed money in London.<sup>4</sup> This time the money was especially easy



because about one-quarter of each column he wrote in "From the Metropolis" actually was revision of material he already had published elsewhere.

Take the very first column, subheaded "Poor Police Arrangements at the Bryan Meeting," for example. Of its four paragraphs, one is a retread. The third paragraph of the column is on the bicycle craze that hit New York City during the mid-nineties. Crane had written about it earlier, in much the same fashion, in an article entitled "New York's Bicycle Speedway" which the S.S. McClure Newspaper Syndicate had released to its subscribers on 5 July 1896. There Crane focused on the bicycle path from the southern end of Central Park, while in the *Evening Gazette* column his view is from the northern end. That is what Crane did in the next two columns also: drew upon material he already had mastered, recast it, and gave it a fresh presentation. He was not learning or doing anything new. "What an Observant Correspondent Sees Worth Noting," the second column, spends a paragraph on popular theaters, which displays interests that had led Crane to write articles such as "The Roof Gardens and Gardeners of New York," released by McClure on 9 August 1896. The treatment of Li Hung Chang's visit to New York in the third column, "An Interesting Letter from Our Correspondent," shows the interest in Chinatown that had produced articles such as "Opium's Varied Dreams," which had been published in the *New York Sun* on 17 May 1896.

The *Evening Gazette* paid Crane in even more valuable coin than money. It published all three columns in the featured position on page 1, right above his initials.<sup>5</sup> That made Crane the star of each issue. He could shine among people who mattered to him: his family, friends, and neighbors in Port Jervis. They evidently mattered to him more than has been realized. Regular publication on the front page of the local newspaper meant that Stephen Crane was not just the Reverend Crane's son or Judge Crane's brother. It meant that he had achieved an identity of his own.

That drive to exert his own identity was strong enough to get him into trouble. It involved him with Dora Clark, the prostitute, and put him on the wrong side of Theodore Roosevelt. All three columns Crane wrote for the *Evening Gazette* are evidence that both episodes were linked.

In the beginning Roosevelt liked Crane. The future president had literary as well as political ambitions and chose friends from among



writers he admired. By the beginning of 1896 he had sought out the talented young newspaperman and novelist, entertained him, asked for his autograph, and established the basis for friendship. It helped, too, that Crane seemed to share Roosevelt's politics and had worked for the election of a Republican government for New York City in the dramatic election of 1894. But by the fall of 1896 Roosevelt developed a loathing for Crane. After Crane died President Roosevelt, hearing a mutual acquaintance praise Crane, angrily sputtered his condemnation of the writer's character.<sup>6</sup> What had happened to turn Roosevelt? Part of what happened is evident in "From the Metropolis."

A bit of New York City history is relevant here. Prior to the elections of 1894 the city had been controlled by Tammany Hall. Then a massive effort by New York State Republicans in conjunction with the city's Good Government organizations resulted in the overthrow of the Tammany Democrats. Two of the most corrupt aspects of the Tammany administration had been its Police Department and its Sanitation Department. When the Republicans and the "Goo Goos" (as Tammany humorists dubbed them) prevailed, Theodore Roosevelt was offered the job of cleaning up the Sanitation Department. But that would not look significant on his record. Reforming the Police Department would look good, so he angled for another offer and was named one of the six commissioners on the bipartisan board that would run it. But being one of six did not have sufficient allure for a man with boundless ambitions, so Roosevelt used brute political force to secure for himself the presidency of the Board of Commissioners.

As President of the Board, Roosevelt worked to reform the department in his own image. An early achievement was the ouster of Thomas F. Byrnes as Superintendent of Police. Byrnes had run the department with strict orders and a strong fist. Roosevelt preferred to substitute his own for both. Partly, one suspects, because Tammany still had a base of great power among the neighborhood saloonkeepers, Roosevelt ordered the police to enforce the Raines Law rigidly. Passed in 1896, the law prohibited the sale of liquor on Sunday except by a licensed hotel having at least ten bedrooms. At a time when the mass of workers had only Sunday off, the effect was to drive neighborhood saloons out of business. Tammany assisted those who could to tack bedrooms onto their saloons, with many of these so-called "Raines Law Hotels" developing into brothels or accommodation houses for



prostitutes.

The thread that ties all three of Crane's *Evening Gazette* columns together is his strong antagonism towards the New York City Police Department. Sometimes directly, sometimes satirically, he is attacking the department as Roosevelt had shaped it. Roosevelt would have been justified in feeling that he was Crane's real target. Moreover, Roosevelt need not have subscribed to the Port Jervis *Evening Gazette* to know how Crane felt. Crane told him. After the William Jennings Bryan rally—a Democrat meeting—at Madison Square Garden on 12 August, he evidently wrote Roosevelt complaining about police behavior there.<sup>7</sup>

So with the conviction that the police were brutes who had license to ride roughshod over the citizenry, Crane became involved in the Dora Clark affair. She obviously is the "unoffending and innocent woman" he mentions in the second *Evening Gazette* column. Clark had been arrested by Policeman Rosenberg of the Nineteenth Precinct—the notorious "Tenderloin" precinct—for soliciting in that loose area of the city. But Clark maintained she had done no such thing: Rosenberg had been denied her sexual favors and was taking revenge by misusing his powers. In addition, she claimed, his colleagues on the force cooperated in harassing her with a series of false arrests. The high point of this tawdry little drama took place as the evening of 16 September 1896 turned into the morning of 17 September. Clark again was arrested for soliciting, but this time she was with Stephen Crane. His testimony in her behalf at the Police Court hearing later that morning won her release. The next month she brought charges against the arresting officer, Charles Becker, and Crane again testified for her. During the intervening month stories about Stephen Crane, Dora Clark, and the New York City Police Department hit the newspapers frequently. There were questions about the relationship between the young novelist and the young prostitute. How long had he known her? He said that they had met for the first time only hours earlier. Why was he risking his reputation to defend her? He said because it was the right thing to do. One question that was asked immediately was why Crane, who had so recently won a glittering future, risked everything by defying the police and siding with a known prostitute in her attempt to tarnish them. Part of the answer is in Crane's column: he believed that "the disgrace and exemplary punishment of some of the official brutes would have a beneficial effect in serving as a warning to over zealous policemen."



Crane had tried to attack Theodore Roosevelt and his work. That was a mistake. The attack failed, as it had to have failed. Becker and Rosenberg were found innocent, and Crane was *persona non grata* in New York City thereafter. The notoriety he received evidently did not go down well in Port Jervis either, which helps to explain why "From the Metropolis" did not continue. A fourth column in the series should have appeared in the *Evening Gazette* on 16 September, the very evening Crane directly involved himself in Dora Clark's mess. The article did not appear. There was no more correspondence "From the Metropolis" after 9 September, and not even the mention of Crane's name in the *Evening Gazette* until 21 December 1896, when it appeared buried in a column of literary notes. Stephen Crane's brief service as metropolitan correspondent for his hometown newspaper had come to an inglorious end.

1.

POOR POLICE ARRANGEMENTS AT  
THE BRYAN MEETING

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A Brutality and Harshness That Was Not  
Possible Under the Byrnes Regime.  
The Terrible Mortality From the  
Heat. A Pretty Part of the City. Etc.  
New York, Aug. 20th, 1896.

The wretched mismanagement which marked the police arrangements at the recent Bryan and Sewall notification at Madison Square Garden has occasioned a great deal of unfavorable comment, finding an echo in the columns of the daily press. The brutality and unnecessary harshness with which the large crowd was handled would have been inexcusable at any time, and on the evening in question it was simply shameful. Such blundering as was painfully in evidence on the night of the 12th inst. would not have been possible under the Byrnes regime, and that fact is another reminder that what we have gained in official honesty through administrative reform is more than counter-balanced by the effects of official incapacity and inexperience.

The terrible mortality resulting from the recent heated term in this city has never been equalled in the memory of the oldest



inhabitant or in the records of the Health Board. Had the same number of deaths resulted as a consequence of an epidemic of disease, New York would have been panic stricken. One shudders to think of the probable results had the streets been in the condition with which we were familiar prior to the advent of Col. Waring. A mournful feature of the visitation was the enormous number of horses stricken down, 1,500 being a conservative estimate. The poor brutes lay stretched out on the pavements in every direction, and the slow removal of their bodies to the offal dock became a serious question. This generation will not readily forget the trials and tribulations of the late heated term.

Upper 5th avenue, from 110th street to Mount Morris Park, presents a very animated appearance when darkness comes to relieve the heat and glare of the sun. Along this thoroughfare, over the abovenamed distance, a fine asphalt pavement is laid, and its popularity as a bicycle roadway is attested by the thousands that wheel their way over the smooth surface of the avenue on their way to and from the Boulevard. The gleaming lamps of green, yellow, and red make a very pretty spectacle, and the variety among the wheels relieve the parade from melancholy. Among the great number of riders, the girls form a very large proportion, and they invariably present a more interesting sight than their male escorts. Your expert bicyclienne does not arch her back until it describes an angle of 45 degrees, threatening curvature of the spine with all its horrors, neither does she take that death-like grip of the handle bar so much affected by her brother wheelmen. She sits erect upon her saddle, with just enough pliancy of position to insure grace, and, attired in a natty, well fitting costume, her appearance is a "thing of beauty and a joy forever."

The shopping ladies of New York are awaiting with a great deal of interest and some impatience the opening of the new Seigal-Cooper store, promised for some time next month. So much has been written of this concern, a great deal of which is probably shrewd advertising, that some curiosity is pardonable. Business methods were to be revolutionized and departments hitherto not associated with the popular idea of a department store were to be included. A bicycle track in a 6th avenue store is a startling novelty, to say the least, and trained nurses and prescription counters are associated in the popular mind with hospitals rather than with dry goods emporiums. A library and a school are also to be provided, these for the employees, and the novel sight of a pert



sales girl yelling cash, with primer in hand, is probably in store for future shoppers.

S.C.

2.

WHAT AN OBSERVANT CORRESPONDENT SEES WORTH NOTING.

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New York's Delicatessen Stores—Indecency  
on the Bill Board—Proctor's Amusement  
Palace—New Use for Hoop Skirts  
—Names Which Suit the Occupations.  
New York, August 27.

One of the necessities which the conditions of metropolitan life has created is the delicatessen store. Within the memory of New Yorkers not very far advanced in years these shops could be counted with two figures, and to most people, the contents of the little store, filled with cans and jars of strange shapes and stranger names, were objects of wonder and awe. With the growth of the city new conditions have arisen, the hasty lunch, which the delicatessen store furnishes, has become a necessary feature of city life and caterers of delicatessen have thrived and multiplied until now their number is legion.

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For some unexplained reason the reformed police administration, early in its career, singled out the harmless and petty traders as subjects whom they could annoy with impunity. An obnoxious sanction of the blue laws regulating the time of opening and closing of the shops was made the basis of a systematic police persecution, and violaters were promptly hauled before a city magistrate, to be as promptly discharged. The dealers are now strongly organized for protection, public opinion is with them, and they will probably have something to say on Election Day.

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It is a queer commentary on the taste of the theatre goers of New York that nastiness is regarded as a marketable commodity, and that the near approach to the danger line of indecency is calculated to attract patronage. The bill board of a prominent Roof



Garden announces with all the prominence that display type can give that its star dancer has been found "*Not Guilty*" and that she will continue the poses and the dances interrupted a few weeks ago by the police. The low tone pervading the entertainments provided by some of our theatrical managers would almost justify an official censorship of the Theatre. The 3rd Ave. Arcade, of Proctor's Amusement Palace, has just been opened to the public, and will add greatly to the facilities enjoyed by that favored resort. The want of a place of amusement for the middle east side of the city was greatly felt until the advent of Proctor, and will be further supplied with the opening of the handsome, new Murray Hill Theatre at 42nd street and Lexington avenue, billed to occur on October 19th.

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Third avenue, over almost its length, has been a most malodorous thoroughfare for the past few months, the street having been ripped open to permit the laying of new gas mains, a work which has proceeded too slowly when the health and comfort of the residents along its route is taken into consideration. It does not seem to have occurred to the proper authorities that a more reasonable time for this illness breeding work could have been selected than in the heat of summer, but then when is there any regard shown for the rights of the humble citizen?

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The writer is not an authority on feminine apparel, but it does seem to him that the once useful and admired hoopskirt has been resurrected from its long abiding place and is now doing inflation duty within the sleeves of up-to-date girls. If this inflation continues to progress the girls will be compelled to weight their shoes to prevent a premature ascension to heaven.

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It is to be hoped that an example will be made of the policeman who arrested an unoffending and innocent woman on 6th avenue the other night. This is a form of outrage that has become very frequent of late, and the disgrace and exemplary punishment of some of the official brutes would have a beneficial effect in serving as a warning to over zealous policemen.

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What's in a name? John Feaster is the promising name of the proprietor of an up-town restaurant, while the Raines defying name



of Weinbeer is owned by a gentleman who dispenses liquid refreshments to the thirsty further down the avenue, and Wah Shing a countryman of Li Hung Chang does Wah Shing in his Third avenue laundry.

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One of the most unsavory sections of the city is that running from 110th to 115th street, from Second avenue east to the river. This section is entirely given over to the Italians and the entire neighborhood is squalid in the extreme. Tall, poverty-stricken tenements with bulging walls are crowded to overflowing with the natives of sunny Italy, and the streets are filled with the same importation. The sidewalks are littered with a miscellaneous assortment of boxes, barrels and pushcarts filled with fruit and vegetables in an advanced state of decay, and the atmosphere is redolent with the bouquet of garlic and onions. The colony is a miniature city in itself, and it speaks well for the thrift of its inhabitants that every block has its Banca Italia.

S.C.

3.

AN INTERESTING LETTER FROM  
OUR CORRESPONDENT.

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The Visit of Li Hung Chang—His Tribute  
to Grant Impressed New York the  
Most—Rapid Increase of "10 Rooms"  
and a Bar Hotels—Campaign Banners.

New York, Sept 8.—The all absorbing topic for the past week, excluding even politics and the weather, has been Li Hung Chang. This exalted Chinaman, with his quaint and embarrassing questions, impassive under all the wonders of our Western civilization, managed to keep the authorities and the people in a constant state of expectation and mild excitement, and his departure was probably a relief to the powers that be. It is embarrassing to be asked, how rich are you, and where did you get it? and Mr. Croker, of London and New York, is probably congratulating himself that he did not run up against this cross-examining Celestial.



During Li's stay here a "trip to Chinatown" was regarded as the correct thing, and a visit to that Oriental quarter amply repaid the trouble of getting there. The narrow, crooked streets were gay with bunting, curious Chinese decorations and lanterns of strange designs. The triangular flag with the blue dragon sprawling across it was everywhere in evidence, with here and there the stars and stripes to prove the patriotism of some Americanized Chinese. Business was almost entirely suspended in Mott and Doyers streets, the Chinamen mingling with the throngs of visitors and explaining the mystical features of the celebration with all the bland affability of their race. It was a great week for Ah Sing.

The incident that impressed New York most favorably with Li was his tact shown in placing a wreath upon the tomb of Grant. The simple tribute of affection and reverence to the memory of the great soldier who had been his friend, and the deep feeling displayed on the occasion won him the esteem of all who witnessed the graceful little ceremony.

The visitor to New York who arrives here for the first time must be struck by the facilities which the city has to offer in the lodging of its guests. We are all familiar with the sumptuous entertainment provided at the Windsor, Plaza, Waldorf, etc., but during the past year the demand for hotel accommodation has apparently increased to such an extent that "hotels" have sprung up on every corner, the main features of which are "10 rooms" and a bar.

The campaign banner is doomed and the campaign portrait painter must seek other fields. In place of the bulky tan work with the party device and the alleged representation of the nominees painted thereon, "Old Glory," with the names of the candidates depending from it, is stretched across the street, and thus a picturesque feature of the old-time canvass is eliminated from the campaign, art and economy being the gainers thereby.

The tanned visages encountered on the streets and in the cars indicate that vacation days are over, and are eloquent of pleasant days spent at country, mountain or sea shore. Not all those who have returned, however, walk with the springy step that should tell of recuperated health and restored energy, as the physicians have been busy with cases of malaria and typhoid contracted at resorts where defective sanitation and impure water have played havoc with weak constitutions. If summer boarders would decline to stop at places where sanitary principles are so flagrantly violated, a necessary lesson might be taught such grasping hotel keepers who



are oblivious to the health and comfort of their patrons.

A rumor that insists upon circulating and which can be traced to no authority is that John Wanamaker intends buying the stock and building of the late firm of Hilton, Hughes & Co. and operating it in connection with his Philadelphia business. With an infusion of Chicago and Quaker City methods the retail business of this city would fairly hum.

S.C.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>I am grateful to Peter Osborne III, Director of the Minisink Valley Historical Society, for extraordinary assistance in Port Jervis and environs; to Janet Katz for research aid; and to the Research and Productive Scholarship Committee of the University of South Carolina for a grant that funded part of the research for this paper.

<sup>2</sup>Charlottesville, 1969-75.

<sup>3</sup>When Crane first got money from *The Red Badge of Courage*, he bought into land in nearby Hartwood. See Katz, "The Estate of Stephen Crane," *Studies in American Fiction* 10 (August 1982): 135-50.

<sup>4</sup>Stephen and Cora did the series of European letters from 15 August through 10 October 1897. They are similar in style, approach, and organization to "From the Metropolis." In an undated letter to his American agent, Paul Revere Reynolds, Crane confessed that the European letters were hackwork for needed cash. See R.W. Stallman and Lillian B. Gilkes, *Stephen Crane: Letters* (New York: New York University Press, 1960), 144-46.

<sup>5</sup>Because Crane had become valuable literary property after publication of *The Red Badge of Courage*, he had been locked into contracts for his output. He had recently made an agreement with William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal* and earlier had entered into another with the S.S. McClure Newspaper Syndicate. Those presumably locked up his immediate newspaper writings. So the initials likely were used to cover his contractual violation. The behavior would not have bothered him, but discovery would have. In the village of Port Jervis the initials were as good as his signature, and his authorship of the columns evidently was an open secret: that, after all, is how the oral tradition started. The *Evening Gazette* had another New York City correspondent, Sidney Earle, who wrote a woman's column entitled "Our New York Letter." That column appeared in the same issues that published "From the Metropolis," but her full name appears in the byline. Obviously she had nothing to hide.

<sup>6</sup>The mutual acquaintance was Jimmy Hare and the incident is reported in Cecil Carnes, *Jimmy Hare: News Photographer* (New York: Macmillan, 1940), 291.

<sup>7</sup>Crane's letter does not survive, which makes his column the only



source of what specifically bothered him. Roosevelt's response of 18 August does survive. (See *Letters*, 128-29.) It defends the police behavior. Given Crane's mood at the time, that must have been provoking.